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**Testimony of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.
Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Affairs & Communication
On HB 5489 (Raised), *An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform*.
Education Committee Hearing of Monday, March 15, 2010**

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Susan Yolen and I am Vice President for Public Affairs and Communication of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. PPSNE is the largest provider of reproductive health care and family planning in Connecticut and Rhode Island, serving over 70,000 patients each year with health care, and connecting to over 10,000 teachers, parents and young people each year through educational programs and professional trainings. I also represent the Healthy Teens Coalition, with over 40 agencies and organization statewide, who have come together this session to support comprehensive health education.

Planned Parenthood's interest in secondary school reform legislation centers on the one credit graduation requirement proposed in comprehensive health education. It is so clear to us, from our experience delivering reproductive health care to young people across the state, that Connecticut's lack of emphasis on health education, in broad strokes, results in teenagers who are uninformed about their own sexual health, and unable to advocate for themselves and their own needs based on accurate information whether at home, in school, with friends or in intimate relationships.

At present, Connecticut's local school districts have a widely varied approach to requiring health education prior to graduation. While a small number of Connecticut districts already offer a full credit of health, most require only a half credit or no required credit at all. We believe that a full credit is a minimum acceptable health requirement, and we agree that health should begin, age appropriately, prior to high school, so that a foundation for these skills commences in the middle school years.

Connecticut's philosophy regarding comprehensive health education is well articulated in the State Department of Education's *Framework for Healthy and Balanced Living*, whose standards insure that students comprehend how to prevent disease, how to access valid health information and services, how to practice health-enhancing behaviors to reduce risks, how to analyze the influence of culture, media and technology on their health, and many other skills that are, in fact, the *critical survival skills our children need to have in an increasingly complicated world*. Learning how to set personal goals and make healthy decisions are critical life lessons...lessons we need the scholars of the future, the citizens and parents of Connecticut's future, the employers and workers of decades to come...to internalize and act upon for their own and the common good.

PPSNE is pleased to support this Secondary School Reform legislation, and also recognizes that enhancing high school graduation requirements is an imperative for our participation in federal funding opportunities available now. We urge the General Assembly to pass Bill 5489 to make Connecticut competitive with other states in the race to secure the funds we need to offer the high quality secondary school experience that our children deserve.